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POINSETTIA SCAB

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Poinsettia scab is a serious disease caused by Sphaceloma poinsettiae Jenkins & Ruehle and is considered a limiting factor in growing poinsettias in Florida. It was found for the first time in 1939 in a nursery in Hawaii (2). A year later it was reported from Goulds, Florida (6), and since then it has been found in Jamaica, Brazil, Guatemala, and Puerto Rico (5).

At the present time the disease is widespread in Florida and specimens have been received from every county where poinsettias are grown commercially. It is interesting to note that Creager (1) found the disease on wild native species of Euphorbia growing as weeds in a nursery.

SYMPTOMS. On the stems S. poinsettiae produces numerous, conspicuously raised, circular to elongated lesions, measuring from a few mm to 1 cm (Fig. 1 B). The color of the lesions is pale buff, often surrounded by a purple or reddish margin. Several lesions may unite and cover a large portion of the stem, sometimes even girdling it, as a result of which the upper portion of the stem dies. On the midrib and major leaf veins the lesions are very similar to those on the stems. On the leaf blade the fungus causes fairly large brown spots that are typically concave on the upper surface and protruding below, giving the leaf a puckered appearance (Fig. 1 A). The spots occurring on the leaf

Fig. 1. Poinsettia scab symptoms on lower leaf surface (A) and stem (B).

margin are roughly hemispherical and cause the leaf to roll inward. Severely affected leaves drop prematurely, especially if the petiole is also involved.

The older stem lesions show slightly depressed centers and are covered with a greyish-brown, velvety layer of conidiophores and conidia. These conidia, when carried to other plants by splashing water drops, will spread the disease.

CONTROL. Spraying the plants at weekly or 10-day intervals with a fungicide will protect them against infection by the scab organism (4). The point should be stressed, however, that this treatment will not cure the plants once they are infected; it only prevents the healthy plants from becoming diseased.

Diseased plants should be promptly isolated and destroyed. Only disease-free plants should be used for propagation. The practice of good sanitation in the nursery cannot be over-emphasized and is the most economical way to control this disease.

Literature Cited

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